

USDAnews

USDA's Employee News Publication—For You & About You!

"Employee Personal Page" Now Rules The Roost For Records Transactions

Plus, No More Payments To OPM In Macon

by Ron Hall
Office of Communications

If you're someone who keeps lists of what's 'In' and what's 'Out,' you can now update that list as follows:

In: "Employee Personal Page"

Out: "Employee Express"

Actually, the Employee Personal Page has been 'In' since its debut at USDA in 1998. According to **Cheryl Ruf**, a human resources specialist in the Office of Human Resources Management, it's an Internet-based system through which employees can make certain changes to a variety of their own personal records directly and safely, without having to rely on any other person to process paperwork pertaining to the change.

Specifically, she said, employees can directly make changes to their (1) federal income tax deduction form, or "W-4," (2) state income tax deduction form, (3) destination of their direct deposit of salaries, including net paychecks and financial allotments, (4) enrollment in the Federal Employee Health Benefits Program, (5) allotments to the Thrift Savings Plan, (6) U.S. Savings Bonds allotments, and (7) residence address. "That's the 'self-service' portion of the

Employee Personal Page," she affirmed.

In addition, employees can view, and thereby validate the accuracy of, other personal items such as the federal W-2 income tax form, all individual leave balances, life insurance information, and information associated with that employee's last 10 submitted travel vouchers.

Penny Forbes, associate director for payroll personnel operations at USDA's National Finance Center in New Orleans, explained that the Employee Personal Page is a feature on NFC's home page—which, of course, is a part of the Department's home page. That NFC web site providing access to the Employee Personal Page is <https://www.nfc.usda.gov/personal/index2.asp>.

"Since it's a website," she pointed out, "employees can access it 24/7. And by using the Employee Personal Page—at whatever time of the day or night is convenient for the employee—that decreases the number of employee-initiated documents which have to be processed through personnel servicing offices within our USDA agencies."

So, why is "Employee Express" now 'Out'?

Denise Leger-Lee, director of OHRM's Personnel, Policy, and Partnership Division, said that Employee Express has done a good job of providing all of the same services as the Employee Personal Page. "But as NFC began further developing the Employee
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Armed with a hammer on his right hip and a nail pouch on his left hip, FSIS's **Jim Duos** is a man on a mission as he heads toward his next construction task. He was one of 24 USDA employees who recently participated in a Habitat for Humanity-sponsored activity to build four single-family homes near downtown St. Paul, Minn. This is thought to be the largest number of USDA employees to have participated as volunteers in such a project. Note **Tom Reimler's** story on page 4.—**PHOTO BY DAVE COSTANZO**

We Want To Know What You Think About This Pub

by Ron Hall
Office of Communications

The **USDA News** is a publication "for and about USDA employees." The format you hold in your hand today is the product of 63 years of evolution, which has included a tabloid the size of a local newspaper section as well as today's more compact letter-size 8-page fold.

But more important than its look is its content. Throughout the year, USDA's Office of Communications strives to give you the news you need when you need it and to feature employees and stories that offer you a glimpse of how your USDA colleagues—at headquarters and field locations and at agricul-

tural posts overseas—are carrying out the vast array of USDA's programs and activities in new, different, unique, and/or unusual ways.

To make sure we are delivering what you want we'd like you to complete the review that follows, either via the Internet or by mail.

The last thorough review was conducted in the early 1990s. It resulted—starting with the January 1996 issue—with making the **USDA News** available on our web-site: www.usda.gov. Click on "Newsroom" and then click on "USDA Publications." We look to you to provide feedback and new ideas so we can better serve you.

To complete the Internet version of the evaluation, use Internet Explorer and go to www.visualpoint.com/usda/surveys/Survey.asp?LNGSURVEYID=6. You'll be in the evaluation. When you have
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Ann M. Veneman

Secretary of Agriculture

The season for giving is upon us and the Combined Federal Campaign is now underway. Having served as the Chairperson for the CFC of the National Capital Area in 2002, I know that federal employees are very generous and are willing to lend a helping hand. And USDA employees are wonderful examples. Time and again you have shown your compassion and I applaud all of you for your past participation.

USDA employees historically donate more than the government average. Last year we exceeded our goal of \$1.4 million by raising \$1.8 million.

With that in mind, this year's USDA CFC Chairman, **Mark Rey**, under secretary for natural resources and environment, has set a Department goal of \$1.5 million, just 5 percent over last year. The

CFC's official campaign slogan this year is "You can be a Superhero or Heroine," but Mark has made it known that his personal slogan for CFC is "Even More in 2004."

This Department attracts the kind of people who understand the value of service, who know how important it is to help those who are less fortunate, and who are willing to take action.

President **George W. Bush** has said that "public service in America today is not just another job, it is an important act of citizenship."

I am proud that the men and women of USDA put truth to those words every single day. I hope you join in answering the President's call to service by making this year the most successful ever for USDA's Combined Federal Campaign.

***The deadline is December 15. Contact your agency CFC coordinator for more information. ■*

"Employee Personal Page"...continued from pg. 2

Personal Page," she advised, "Employee Express ended up being a duplicative service. Plus, USDA was paying a specific fee to the Office of Personnel Management's Staffing Service Center in Macon, Georgia, for its participation in Employee Express."

In addition, she noted, OPM, in effect, served as a middleman in the Employee Express process. "When an employee would enter information into his or her individual account in Employee Express," she explained, "that employee would essentially be putting information into OPM's data base. OPM would then transmit that information to NFC—and that's the service USDA was paying for."

"But with the Employee Personal Page," she affirmed, "there is no middleman, and therefore no additional specific fee to USDA—and that's more cost-effective for the Department."

"Also," Leger-Lee advised, "we think employees will like EPP because, among other aspects, you can actually see your pay and leave data on your computer screen, plus many other items. Our version of Employee Express didn't offer as many selections."

According to **Judith Dudley**, director of the Information Resources Division for Departmental Administration, USDA employees at headquarters and field locations were sent a memorandum dated June 28, 2004, signed by Deputy Assistant Secretary for Administration **John Surina**, that described the "newly enhanced self-service features" of the Employee Personal Page. The memo also advised that, as of October 1, 2004, USDA would "discontinue participation" in Employee Express.

NFC information technology specialist **Polly Smith** added that USDA employees received a similar notice in the 'message box' in the

Statement of Earnings and Leave for Pay Periods No. 14, No. 15, and No. 19.

USDA employees visiting the Employee Express website after October 1 are being advised to contact either their servicing personnel office or their payroll office.

NFC payroll personnel analyst **Cliff Lee** said that employees who have not already signed up to access the Employee

Personal Page may visit the NFC website and follow the instructions for 'New User' in order to obtain, via postal mail, a required Personal Identification Number or PIN.

"Once you get that PIN, the only other number you'll need is your Social Security Number to access the Employee Personal Page," he said. Lee added that most USDA employees have already been issued a PIN.

But how safe is this system?

"The security system we've employed with the Employee Personal Page," emphasized NFC computer specialist **Steve Cunningham**, "ensures that an employee's information is protected through use of state-of-the-art, 128-bit



*Next stop: the MS 150 bikeathon for OCIO's **Dan Stoltz** (left) and **Marilyn Holland** (center), as well as for retired RHS employee **Bob Nelson**, as they model their "I'm Riding for Janet Burt" t-shirts. In turn, this particular "Team Janet" photo of those three fundraising bicyclists was also made into a t-shirt—and that t-shirt now sports the autographs of 21 OCIO employees. Note the story on page 6.—PHOTO BY EFREN VALERIO*

'Secure Socket Layer' encryption."

Ruf acknowledged that the EPP does not allow for transactions by telephone—it is totally web-based. "But, last year, phone transactions on the Employee Express constituted only about two percent of the total transactions," she advised.

Ruf then added that there were an estimated 14,000 transactions by employees using the Employee Personal Page in 2003.

"And that was with no publicity," she observed. "So, now that the Employee Personal Page is getting some publicity, its use oughta go great guns!" ■

Notes *from USDA Headquarters*

Secretary **Ann M. Veneman** unveiled additional eGovernment products aimed at improving delivery of services for both employees and the public. They include *My.USDA.gov*, a new Spanish language USDA website, and new online services for producers who want to enroll in the 2005 crop programs. In addition, the Agricultural Research Service released the first draft of the Bovine Genome Sequence to biomedical and agricultural research via the Internet.

In October, Secretary Veneman kicked-off National School Lunch Week by launching the HealthierUS School Challenge, part of President **George W. Bush's** HealthierUS Initiative, which encourages all Americans to eat a nutritious diet and become physically active each day. This effort complements the National Obesity Conference sponsored by USDA and held in Bethesda, Md., Oct. 25-26.

My.USDA.gov: *My.USDA.gov* is the latest installment in USDA's efforts to provide customers with the information they need more quickly and easily. Accessible from the USDA homepage, *My.USDA.gov* allows employees and the public to customize a page in three easy steps by going to **www.usda.gov** and clicking on the "Login" or "New User" button located on the left navigation bar. Employees will be able to one-stop shop for government services by creating a page that links to everything from the USDA Employee Benefits Office to your "Employee Personal Page." Note the story on page 1.

www.usda.gov/EnEspañol: In recognition of National Hispanic Heritage Month, Sept. 15 to Oct. 15, Secretary Veneman launched a new Spanish-language website. USDA "EnEspañol" unites the English-language website materials under one bilingual umbrella for

the first time. In addition to a new look and easier navigation, the website offers comprehensive information about accessing food and nutrition programs, food safety tips, conservation programs, and Rural Development housing programs.

2005 Farm Program Sign-up:

For the first time producers can enroll online for the 2005 Direct and Counter-Cyclical Payment Program (DCP). The electronic service allows producers to choose 2005 DCP payment options, assign crop shares, and sign and submit their contracts electronically from any computer with Internet access. June 1, 2005 is the deadline for program enrollment.

Bovine Genome Sequencing:

In early October, Under Secretary for Research, Education, and Economics **Joseph Jen** released the first draft of the bovine genome-sequencing project into free public databases for use by biomedical and agricultural researchers around the globe. This \$53 million international effort is expected to provide a number of benefits to basic biology, which may be translated to more efficient and profitable methods of meat and milk production for beef and dairy producers. Identifying, mapping, and understanding the function of genes in cattle will make the nation's food supply safer by providing methods for genetic tracking of animals and animal products, selecting animals with reduced risk for disease, and decreasing the use of antibiotics.

Public Partner Of The Year:

That's the award Secretary Veneman accepted in October from the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU) in recognition of the many USDA efforts to promote educational and employment opportunities for Hispanic students. Each year,

USDA invests more than \$30 million in educational programs targeting Hispanic students and institutions. Those programs include the HACU internship program and Secretary Veneman's Public Service Leaders Scholarship program begun in 2002.

HealthierUS School Challenge:

Secretary Veneman issued a challenge to Team Nutrition Schools during National School Lunch Week, October 10-16.

Currently, Team Nutrition schools receive nutrition education materials, technical assistance materials for school food service staff, and materials to build school and community support for healthy eating and physical activity. The Challenge sets new voluntary nutrition and physical activity standards to achieve Gold and Silver levels of accomplishment. There are already 28,000 Team Nutrition Schools eligible to participate.

"Across the country, schools, families and communities are working to fight childhood obesity. They are finding new and exciting ways to encourage healthy eating habits and physical activity. The HealthierUS School Challenge provides an exciting new incentive for schools to take increasingly bold steps to address the problems of childhood overweight and obesity," said Veneman. For more information go to **www.fns.usda.gov/tn**.

Food Safety Institute Of The Americas:

A new hemispheric food safety institute opened in Miami in October to develop and promote effective food safety education and training programs throughout the Americas.

Deputy Secretary **Jim Moseley** said, "FSIA will address food safety



Deputy Secretary **Jim Moseley** (left) presents a traditional gift of tobacco to **Louie Dick**, a member of the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, at USDA's celebration of "America's First Farmers," held in USDA's Patio in Washington, DC on September 20. The event coincided with the opening of the Smithsonian Institution's newest museum, the National Museum of the American Indian, which is located on the National Mall in Washington, DC. —**PHOTO BY ALICE WELCH**

and public health concerns by establishing and enhancing important networks among regulatory officials, researchers, public health officials, consumers, meat, poultry and egg processors and producers, as well as animal producers."

Under Secretary for Food Safety **Elsa Murano** said the institute supports the priorities established by Secretary Veneman to spur the exchange of information and technology among countries around the world, which was the centerpiece of ministerial level meetings on science and technology held in Sacramento, Calif., in June 2003 and follow-up meetings in May 2004 in Costa Rica and in Burkina Faso in June 2004.

Healthy Forests Initiative:

By October 1, USDA's Forest Service and the Department of Interior's land management agencies had reduced hazardous fuels on 4 million acres, exceeding their goal of 3.7 million acres. Of these acres, some 2.3 million were located where houses meet or intermingle with wildland vegetation. Since President Bush took office, federal land management agencies have removed hazardous fuels from more than 10 million acres of public lands—twice the pace of the previous eight years.

—**PATRICIA KLINTBERG**

Employees *make these things happen*

Food Safety

Our Game Plan In St. Paul: "Have Tools, Will Help"

Our goal as feds is to ensure that 'public service' is woven into the fabric of every workday in the federal government. But sometimes we feds have the opportunity to take that a step further.

That's what happened this past summer when 24 USDA employees participated—hands-on—in a community-based volunteer project to build four single-family homes near downtown St. Paul, Minn.

According to **Louise Fox**, a branch chief in the Food Safety and Inspection Service's Human Resources Field Office in Minneapolis, the project was sponsored by the Twin Cities Habitat for Humanity and the Twin Cities Federal Executive Board. "But USDA employees helped provide a lot of the muscle," she emphasized.

"Other USDA employees around the country may have participated in similar Habitat for Humanity projects in their local communities," affirmed **Jim Duoos**, a fellow branch chief in that FSIS Office. "But we think that we might have had the largest number of USDA employees participating in this particular undertaking."

And the 'undertaking' in question began even before the actual construction started this past

spring. **Brenda Foster**, an FSIS human resources assistant in that office, noted that employees from organizations participating in this project—including FSIS and the Agricultural Research Service—wanted to raise funds to help offset the incidental expenses involved in the overall 'build.'

"So our employees put together creative gift baskets that were raffled off during the 'Taste of Downtown Minneapolis' fundraising event held here in mid-June," she said. "Ultimately, \$4,800 was raised at that event—which allowed the build to proceed."

FSIS position classification specialist **Valerie Yarbrough** coordinated the scheduling of employees from her office for the actual build. From June 22 to 24—the middle of the week—employees took annual leave as they left behind their business attire, computers, and titles and took on such endeavors as cabinet installers, woodworkers, and landscapers.

FSIS human resources assistant **Dianne Kaldun**, who volunteered for all three days, helped to install kitchen cupboards and closet shelves, including the round bar which holds clothes hangers. "I learned some good construction skills in the process," she noted, "including how cupboard doors

need to be specifically cut, and how wood components need to be installed flush against each other."

Tyson Ochsner, a soil scientist with ARS's Soil and Water Management Research Unit in St. Paul, had received an e-mail about this project. "So I talked with some colleagues here about getting involved," he recounted. As a result, he, ARS research leader **John Baker**, ARS research technician **Todd Schumacher**, and ARS research assistant **Ryan Vial** each volunteered for a day.

Ochsner related that he and Baker installed seven doors throughout one of the houses, and then put wood trim around those doors. "We were working next to a retired professional trim carpenter—and with his speed, the guy put us to shame," he laughed.

FSIS computer specialist **Eric Carrier** worked on landscaping around a house. "In the process, I picked up some tips on how to plant a tree," he said.

Bonnie Ketola, a resource management assistant at FSIS's Minneapolis District Office, was one of six staffers in her office to participate. "There were about ten different things going on," she recalled. "So I volunteered to put vinyl siding on a garage and helped pour concrete onto the

garage floor."

"The coordinators of the project would gather us together, tell us how to do something, and then BOOM—we'd go do it!"

"I had wanted to learn something I'd never done—and boy, did this ever qualify!" she quipped.

Tamara Baker, an FSIS management assistant in that office, helped frame a garage at the site.

Participants each received a red t-shirt which, on its front, depicts a stylized sketch of a house and makes a reference to federal participation in this project, and, on its back, reads "Serving America, Serving the Community."

"I've worn my t-shirt here at work on 'Casual Friday,'" Baker noted. "It's a comfortable shirt—and it's a good way to continue promoting this project."

—**TOM REIMLER**



Tom Johnson, a human resources specialist with the FSIS Human Resources Field Office in Minneapolis, gets ready to install an aluminum soffit under a roof overhang.—**PHOTO BY DAVE COSTANZO**

Natural Resources and Environment

Many FS Employee Artifacts Filled Up These Time Capsules

"Two years down, 23 more years to go."

Wes Yamamoto wasn't talking about his plans for retirement. Instead, Yamamoto, a Forest Service forester with the Tiller Ranger District on the Umpqua National Forest in southwestern Oregon, was referring to when he'll, once again, get to look at the items which he and other Forest Service employees had placed in a time capsule back in 2002.

Actually, he clarified, *four* time capsules were dedicated, sealed, and then placed in a vault that was, in turn, buried underground next to a local historic FS structure in Tiller, Ore. This all took

place during the annual Tiller History Day picnic in June 2002.

"The four time capsules were designed to be 'regenerative,'" pointed out FS district botanist **Chris Rusch**. Normally, she explained, a time capsule is sealed for a specified, but long, period of time and is then eventually opened once—to share the contents of the past with those opening it in the future.

"But by contrast," Rusch noted, "when you open a regenerative time capsule you take out its contents, replace those materials with items from the present day—whenever that is—and then reseal and rebury the time capsule for another period of years."

In addition, added FS district silviculturist **Paula Trudeau**, all *four* time capsules were regenerative. "So, while all four time capsules—each nearly two cubic feet in size—were filled at the same time," she said, "they'll be unsealed and opened sequentially, but in different time frames."

"Specifically," said FS district administrative officer **Chris Hughes**, "Time Capsule One, to be opened in 2027—25 years from its dedication—contains items from circa 1927 as well as predictions for the future." Time Capsule Two is to be opened in 2052—50 years from its dedication—and contains items from circa 1952. Time Capsule Three is to be opened in 2077—

Editor's Roundup *USDA's people in the news*



Russell Davis is the administrator of the Rural Housing Service.

Before joining USDA, from April 2004 until his appointment to this position Davis served as a senior policy advisor in the Office of Sallie Mae Oversight at the U.S. Department of the Treasury. From 1998-2004 he worked for Enumerate Solutions, Inc., a Tysons Corner, Va.-based software company he had founded in 1998 that specializes in financial reporting and search engine software. From 1990-98 he was managing director at Hamilton Securities, a Washington, DC-based securities broker dealer specializing in public finance and mortgage securities.

Davis served as the acting deputy assistant secretary for housing operations at the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development from 1989-90. He began his career in public financing in

1983, working for a private bond firm in New York City, where he structured tax-exempt bond issues supporting public corporations.

Art Garcia, the previous administrator of RHS, is now the director of the Community Development Financial Institutions Fund at the U.S. Department of the Treasury. ■



Sadhna True is the director of the Office of Civil Rights.

From November 2001 until her selection for this position True served as the deputy associate general counsel for the Civil Rights Division in the Office of the General Counsel. In that position she oversaw litigation defense activities in equal employment opportunity and civil rights cases including federal district court cases, class action cases, Equal Employment Opportunity Commission cases, Merit Systems Protection Board appeals, and administrative proceedings.

From 1998-2001 True worked as a trial attorney in the Civil Frauds Section at the U.S. Department of Justice, where she handled legal issues under the False Claims Act. She was a litigator in private practice with a Washington, DC-based law firm from 1992-98, where she focused on civil litigation matters with an emphasis on employment litigation.

David Winningham, the previous director of the Office of Civil Rights, retired from that position following 32 years of service, all with USDA. ■



David Grahn is the associate general counsel for rural development with the

Office of the General Counsel.

From 1996 until his selection for this position Grahn was the assistant general counsel for legislation in OGC, where he was responsible for the drafting and

reviewing of legislation and the reviewing of Congressional testimony that affected agencies within USDA. He was detailed to the U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Forestry, and Nutrition in 1995 during Congress' consideration of the Federal Agriculture Improvement and Reform Act of 1996, also known as the Farm Bill of 1996. From 1992-95 he served as a confidential assistant to the administrator of the Farm Service Agency.

From 1991-92 Grahn was an associate attorney in private practice at Arent, Fox, Kintner, Plotkin, and Kahn at its headquarters office in Washington DC, where he concentrated on agricultural law. He began his career in OGC as a staff attorney in Washington, DC, in 1986.

Arnold Grundeman, OGC's previous associate general counsel for rural development, retired from that position following over 33 years of federal service, all with OGC. ■

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75 years from its dedication—and contains items from circa 1977. Time Capsule Four is to be opened in 2102—100 years from its dedication—and contains items from circa 2002.

According to **Jill Dufour**, then a district ranger who is now the environmental coordinator for FS's Pacific Northwest Region in Portland, Ore., this was a community effort. "But Forest Service employees built the time capsules and collected items from their fellow employees. The items were then put in the time capsules—along with items from others," she explained.

"We wanted the items to be intergenerational," she emphasized.

According to FS district facilities technician **Joe Dodson**, such items included a logger's tools and field notes, a Burger King paper wrapper, tree seeds, an FS belt buckle, and a color photo of the tallest sugar pine tree in America—which is located in the Tiller Ranger District. "And don't forget the Spongebob Squarepants plastic doll," laughed **Ken Powell**, an FS district fire engine foreman.

Alan Baumann, currently an FS fire ecologist on the Umpqua National Forest in Roseburg, Ore., at the time was a district planner on the

Tiller Ranger District. He chaired the committee which coordinated the time capsule event. He noted that about one-half of the contributions to the four time capsules came from FS employees and the rest came from area students, elementary through high school, as well as residents of the community.

He said that all items were reviewed for suitability by his committee. Then the items were photographed—for later viewing by local residents—before being sealed and then buried during a formal ceremony at the picnic.

Baumann pointed out that many of the items placed in the particular time capsule containing items from 2002 reflected reactions to the events of Sept. 11, 2001. "I also noticed that there were essentially two generations of Forest Service people involved—which were reflected in their contributions," he said. "There were retired Forest Service employees from the World War II generation who contributed items, and there were agency employees from today."

"If there isn't a tradition of history—good or bad—to pass down to the next generation, then the history could be lost," reflected **Cheryl Walters**, the FS public affairs officer on the Umpqua National Forest.

Now, concerning that time capsule which is to be opened in 2027: does Yamamoto plan to be there—onsite—when the seals are broken and the contents are unveiled?

"I could be retiring before the decade is out," he said. "So in 2027 I may be lying on a beach in Hawaii, where I'm from—and, of course, I'll be thinking about that time capsule every day..."

—RON HALL



"Doesn't anybody have any cold drinks, puleeez?!" asks FS's **Ron Lizotte** (center, in hole), as he, FS's **Joe Dodson** (left), and FS's **Ken Powell** take an extremely brief break, while preparing the ground for the burial of four time capsules.—PHOTO BY CHRIS RUSCH



Darlene Barnes is the regional administrator of the Food and Nutrition Service's Mountain

Plains Region, headquartered in Denver.

From July 2003 until her selection for this position Barnes served as acting regional administrator. She had been the deputy regional administrator since June 1998. From 1990-97 she worked in FNS's [then] Office of Governmental Affairs and Public Information, at the agency's headquarters office in Alexandria, Va., as a public affairs specialist. Within that period, during 1997 she served as acting deputy administrator of that office, after having been director of public

affairs from 1994-97.

Barnes worked as an information specialist with USDA's [then] Office of Information Resources Management, first at USDA headquarters in Washington, DC, and then at Fort Collins, Colo., from 1984-89. Later in 1989 she worked as an industry liaison in the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service's Trail Boss Program in Hyattsville, Md. She began her USDA career with the [then] Rural Electrification Administration in 1976 at REA headquarters in Washington, DC.

Bill Ludwig, the previous regional administrator of FNS's Mountain Plains Region, is now the regional administrator of the agency's Southwest Region, headquartered in Dallas. ■



USDA employees around the country haven't been reluctant to participate in activities that raise funds for worthy causes.

For instance, some years ago a Natural Resources Conservation Service employee in Davis, Calif., participated in a 2,000-mile bike ride from Brownsville, Texas to Washington, DC. She rode that distance as part of a fundraiser for AIDS research. More recently, three male employees with the Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service in Washington, DC, voluntarily shaved their heads or got buzz-

cuts, as part of a cancer research fundraiser, in support of a CSREES colleague who was recovering from breast cancer. And every year USDA employees across the nation walk or run in various medical research-related fund-raising activities such as Race For The Cure.

This past June two employees with the Office of the Chief Information Officer participated in a two-day bikeathon in support of a colleague. What's unusual is that they each have a unique 'personally customized garment' to prove it.

Marilyn Holland, chief of OCIO's Program Planning and Management Division, and **Dan Stoltz**, a team leader in that division, rode their bicycles in the MS Ride 150 "Tour de Shore," a two-day, 150-mile bikeathon fundraiser *continued on pg. 7...*

PROFILE PLUS *More About: Scott Charbo*



The spark behind the effort to help employees and consumers navigate USDA's web site is a student of biology with a Master of Science degree in plant science.

While the leap from those studies to a mindset that sees technological answers to business problems may seem unlikely, **Scott Charbo**, USDA's Chief Information Officer, said there are similarities. "Biology is a study of systems, a lot

of those principles you can relate to IT and business."

The transformation that led Charbo to become USDA's IT guru began when he was fresh out of graduate school and working as a county extension agent in Florida. "When I got there, there was a computer in a box in the corner of the room. I said, 'What's in the box?' The answer: 'A computer.' I said, 'Why is it in a box?' The answer: 'Because we don't know how to use it.'" After convincing the office secretary that the computer was far more versatile than her beloved typewriter, office functions quickly became the computer's domain.

Next Charbo headed to industry, working in environmental and regulatory affairs, taking on special projects like using aerial imaging of fields to market fertilizer and seeds. Then, as president of a ConAgra Foods subsidiary, he ventured into programs that allowed companies to trace food products from farm to table.

"We tracked a major manufacturer of French Fries. We sold them the potatoes and they wanted to assure themselves that the product was labeled properly. We started building those data bases and today I could tell you by looking at any bar code on the bag, what lot and what field those potatoes came from," he said.

At USDA Charbo has taken on a task of enormous proportions. "The President has said we should organize by customer needs, be 'customer centric.' Instead, we had been organizing as we were organized."

The challenge was that USDA has 9 million web pages. A user looking for information about blueberries, for example, theoretically would have to go through 9 million web hits. But Charbo looked at it this way: "We had that information in our domain, so we needed to put the tools together and organize it so it is packaged and brought to the customer in the content

desired."

In short, that's what *My.USDA.gov* is all about. It allows you to customize the USDA home page to match your interests. By establishing who you are through the 'eAuthentication' process, you are able to find employee information securely and, most importantly, you need only one ID and password to use the 111 web-based applications currently available. In addition, when information is changed on one page, say, about blueberries, it will automatically change on all other related pages.

Because Charbo's shop decided to use one portal—think of a house where everyone enters through the front door to get to the different rooms in the house—instead of letting each agency build their own portal, the information flow through the entire Department is more reliable. In the past, messages to "all" employees could ping back due to individual agency firewalls. Now when you see such a message you can be sure it has reached all employees—that is, as long as their email address is up to date.

Last Book Read: "*Testosterone Inc. Tales of CEO's Gone Wild*" by **Christopher Byron**

Last Movie Seen: "*Thunderbirds*"—accompanied by **Josh Charbo**, age 5

Hobbies: "Any time I have I spend with the kids." **Emily** is 10, **Josh** 5. Charbo also enjoys woodworking, specifically fretwork that is quite delicate.

Favorite Weekend Breakfast: Eggs and grits, bacon, or sausage.

Priorities In The Months Ahead: "Finishing certification of our systems. We have 460 IT systems, like the financial system that pays producers or the Electronic Benefit Transfer of Food Stamps. We have to assure ourselves that the systems are managed properly. That means the data and access to it is controlled, that administrative rights are separated from certain functions, that if a server goes down we don't lose all the data and that the system is hack proof. Then you verify these systems and that's called certification and accreditation. These are the risks we have with these systems and we accept these risks and are managing them under these guidelines. Traditionally USDA did not do this. They did not even have a list of systems. But now we have a certification process and we had 400 systems finished by the end of September."

—**PATRICIA KLINTBERG**

through Maryland's Eastern Shore, in support of research to find a cure for multiple sclerosis. They were riding on behalf of their colleague, OCIO program analyst **Janet Burt**, who has contracted that disease.

What made this activity particularly eye-catching was that, prior to their ride, they had made customized t-shirts to support that effort. The short-sleeve, cotton t-shirts were emblazoned with an 8" x 10" color head shot of Burt. On top of the photo, printed in cream-colored letters, were the words "I'm Riding for Janet Burt."

"In 2003 I had biked in a similar fundraiser for MS in Seneca Falls, New York," Holland recounted. "Janet had contributed financially to my ride."

Then this year Holland determined that she'd ride in the bikeathon sponsored by the Maryland Chapter of the Multiple Sclerosis Society. "I knew that Dan was an avid biker—and he readily agreed to ride as well," she noted.

In turn, they approached Burt with the idea

of biking on her behalf. "She liked the idea," Stoltz affirmed.

Holland had seen personalized t-shirts during her biking in Seneca Falls. So she came up with the idea of a t-shirt with Burt's photo on it. **Bob Nelson**, Holland's husband and a program analyst in the Rural Housing Service until he retired in 2003, snapped a digital photo of Burt and had it printed on iron-on paper. Then Stoltz ironed the image onto four t-shirts—for bicyclists Holland, Stoltz, and Nelson and for Burt as well.

So, how did the t-shirt fare during the June 12-13 bike ride?

"Well, actually, a cotton t-shirt doesn't 'breathe' very well during a bikeathon," Stoltz acknowledged. "So we wore the t-shirt *before* and *after* the bikeathon—but we wore biking gear *during* the event."

"Besides, I didn't want to 'sweat on Janet'," he quipped.

"But we *did* wear our t-shirts to the ceremony following the event," added Holland. "And

we were the only ones there who had 'individually personalized clothing' like that."

Holland and Stoltz created individual websites and then invited friends, relatives, and USDA colleagues to financially contribute to their participation in the MS 150 bikeathon.

Just before the event, Holland, Stoltz, and Nelson had their picture taken sporting their "I'm Riding for Janet Burt" t-shirts. In turn, that subsequent photo—called the "Team Janet" pic—was ironed onto yet another t-shirt and was given to Burt.

"21 of my OCIO colleagues who had made contributions to the MS 150 signed my 'Team Janet' shirt," Burt emphasized. They all signed in indelible ink. "And, I want to tell you, I wear that t-shirt proudly and often. I wear it when I'm gardening—and I even wear it as a nightshirt."

"So that way, even when I'm sleeping," she laughed, "I can be thinking about those terrific—and very thoughtful—colleagues of mine." ■

—RON HALL

This Pub...continued from pg. 1

completed the review and have reached the end, hit the block marked "Submit."

If you are using the hard-copy version of the evaluation that appears in this story, mail your completed review to **USDA News Review**, Rm. 412-A Whitten Bldg., Office of Communications, USDA, 1400 Independence Ave. SW, Washington, DC 20250-1300.

Please complete the review as soon as possible. Deadline for submission is January 1, 2005. We look forward to providing the results in an upcoming issue of the **USDA News**.

Question:

1) How often do you read the *USDA News*?

- (A) Always (B) Sometimes
(C) Never

2) Here are three primary goals in publishing the *USDA News*:

(A) To feature stories which show how USDA employees both at headquarters and field locations are helping to carry out the mission of this Department in new, different, unique, and/or unusual ways, (B) To carry stories with a USDA focus related to such issues as personnel matters, financial concerns, and employee benefits, (C) To carry stories

which show USDA employees as newsmakers, both within and outside the Department.

3) Are these the best goals for this publication?

- (A) Yes (B) No

4) If yes, do you think the *USDA News* has been successful in accomplishing these goals?

- (A) Yes (B) No

5) If no, what do you think is a more appropriate purpose?

6) The following news items generally appear in each issue of the *USDA News*. How do you rate them in term of their usefulness?

1 = Extremely Useful, 2 = Fairly Useful, 3 = Not Very Useful, 4 = Don't Bother

7) News stories and feature stories in each issue

- (A) 1 (B) 2 (C) 3 (D) 4

8) Photos in each issue

- (A) 1 (B) 2 (C) 3 (D) 4

9) "Employees Make These Things Happen"

- (A) 1 (B) 2 (C) 3 (D) 4

10) "The Secretary's Column"
(A) 1 (B) 2 (C) 3 (D) 4

11) "People in the News"
(A) 1 (B) 2 (C) 3 (D) 4

12) "Profile Plus"
(A) 1 (B) 2 (C) 3 (D) 4

13) "Notes from USDA Headquarters"
(A) 1 (B) 2 (C) 3 (D) 4

14) "Administrative Nuggets"
(A) 1 (B) 2 (C) 3 (D) 4

15) "USDA-Sponsored Calendar Highlights"
(A) 1 (B) 2 (C) 3 (D) 4

16) Are there any other sections, or items of news interest, you would like to see included? If so, please list them.

17) Are there any other sections, or items of news interest, you would like eliminated? If so, please list them.

18) Is the length of items in the *USDA News*:

- (A) Just about right (B) Too long
(C) Too short

19) How do you rate the size, design, and layout of the *USDA News*?

- (A) Excellent (B) Good (C) Fair
(D) Poor (E) Unsatisfactory

20) What, if anything, would you want to see different in either the size, design, or layout?

21) Which version of the *USDA News* do you usually read?

- (A) Internet (B) printed hard copy

22) Would you prefer to access the *USDA News* online, rather than read it in the printed hard copy format?

- (A) Yes (B) No

23) In terms of usefulness, how do you rate the *USDA News*?

- (A) Excellent (B) Good (C) Fair
(D) Poor (E) Unsatisfactory ■



"Hey Ron, we don't hafta be looking for any buried treasure, because we're gonna be burying some treasure—as soon as this hole is deep enough!" quips FS's **Joe Dodson** (left), as he works with FS's **Ron Lizotte** (center, in hole) and FS's **Ken Powell**. The three were preparing an underground spot adjacent to a historic FS structure (left background) for the burial of a concrete vault (right). That vault would soon hold four time capsules. Then, one time capsule per year will be opened—but not until the years 2027, 2052, 2077, and 2102. Note the story on page 4.—**PHOTO BY CHRIS RUSCH**



Help Us Find Melissa Nicole Borquez

Missing: 6-9-2003

From: El Monte, CA

D.O.B. 1-15-1988

Sex: Female

Hair: Brown

Eyes: Brown

Height: 5 ft. 5 in.

Weight: 160 lbs.

If you have information, please call

1-800-843-5678

NATIONAL CENTER FOR MISSING AND EXPLOITED CHILDREN

USDA-Sponsored Calendar Highlights

■ Month of October

*National Disability Employment
Awareness Month*

USDA headquarters and field offices
(202) 720-7314 or (202) 720-6382 (TTY)

■ October 26

MRP 1890 Presidents Forum

Washington, DC
(301) 734-5470 or 1-800-877-8339 (TTY)

■ October to December

Combined Federal Campaign

USDA headquarters offices
(202) 720-1290 or 1-800-877-8339 (TTY)

■ Month of November

*American Indian/Alaskan Native
Heritage Month*

USDA headquarters and field offices
(202) 720-7314 or (202) 720-6382 (TTY)

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